

Treppenwitz

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/26549752) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/26549752>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham & Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham
Additional Tags:	Post-Canon , On the Run , Cabins , Absence , Betrayal , Realization , Hunting & Fishing , Murder Husbands , Missing Persons , Unresolved Emotional Tension
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Of Teacups and Time
Stats:	Published: 2020-09-19 Words: 4,293 Chapters: 1/1

Treppenwitz

by [blythechild](#)

Summary

Treppenwitz (German, noun): an ironic and absurd coincidence; something that, if it were not true, would seem like a bad joke.

While on the lam in Europe, Will suddenly disappears. Hannibal is left to ponder his next move, his unwillingness to leave Will behind, and the irony of suddenly realizing he needs another person to keep going.

This is a work of fanfiction, and as such I do not claim ownership over the characters herein. It was created as a personal amusement. This work is suitable for readers 14 and up.

Hannibal nearly ruined the hollandaise. Later, he unforgivably and brutally overcooked the veal shank. And finally, sometime after that, he nicked his fingers while slicing some chanterelles. As the blood dripped and pooled on the wood cutting board staining the delicate fungi, he was enraged with himself.

Will had been missing for three days. He'd taken the car and gone to town twenty kilometers away for supplies, just as he always did. His German was terrible but, as he accurately pointed out, "I look harmless. Fragile. Everyone wants to help me." Hearing that, Hannibal had taken a moment to indulge in nostalgia; he, too, once thought of Will as fragile. Like a splintered windshield or kintsugi: beautifully close to being ruined. He knew better now – knew that Will had a taste for the darkness that roiled just under his skin his whole life. Hannibal was proud of that, as if he'd been its midwife and yanked it screaming into reality for Will to hold and cherish. But it also meant that Will couldn't be controlled, as Hannibal couldn't. It gave Will power, and perhaps it had given him the power to walk away. Will didn't need anything more from Hannibal, and the irony now was Hannibal *needed* Will.

"You can't go," Will had said. "You know you can't. I saw your photo on the wall of the Deutsche Post, for chrissakes. You're famous and very recognizable. I, on the other hand, look like a hapless tourist."

"There's a Christmas market this week," Hannibal had argued. "Lots of unfamiliar faces will be milling around. I could blend in."

Will had laughed heartily. "*Hannibal*. No one looks like you. You will always be 'Hannibal Lecter'. Even with the beard."

Hannibal had stroked his greying facial hair a little petulantly. Without regular access to a decent barber, he thought he looked positively rugged. But...

"Don't get duped about the shallots again," he'd mumbled instead, and Will left like it was any other day in their fugitive existence. But he'd never come home.

Hannibal stopped in mid-stride as he paced the kitchen. *Home*. The term bubbled up in his subconscious, but it wasn't one he was accustomed to employing, not in the way most people used it. The Baltimore house was beautiful and something he took pride in, but it never held the golden feeling of acceptance and safety associated with 'a home'. It was merely a place to work, to cook, to entertain – an extension of his 'person suit'. It represented him in a plausible and enviable way to society. Will once called it "anthropological chic", stating that it contained too many decorative skulls to be considered comfortable outside of a museum. And that was the essence of its failure: its lack of comfort. Hannibal was a man who enjoyed discomfort – both for himself and in others – so he was blind to its disappointment. But the essence of a home was comfort; an invitation to linger.

He looked around the meager kitchen. It was barely tolerable to his needs, in a dark, pokey stone cottage he never would've chosen himself. But the rent was cheap, and their landlord was old and uninterested in his tenants' business. It was far enough away from any town or appreciably curious human being that he and Will became almost invisible. They only had

each other for company and that was often silent and solitary. And somehow it was... fine. The cottage sat on land that backed into a dark forest older than any of the locals' memory, and the furnishings included an ancient rifle. So, Will trekked off into its gloomy expanse regularly, reappearing hours later with a fat hare in hand or a wild pheasant, presenting them to Hannibal like a smug cat with a mouse. He even found a river deep in the woods, and then his day trips were longer, but his gifts were augmented by carp and tench, and an odd serenity that smoothed his edges and provoked his smile without warning. At least he hadn't come back with any strays yet.

They spent nights before the smoking fireplace, reading or talking about whatever came to them, fighting off the December chill with rough sweaters and ample brandy. And Hannibal entertained himself by drawing Will often – endless studies of him slumped in a spring-less chair before the fire, or cleaning the rifle, or gutting a fish in the kitchen. Each one was quiet and eerie and accurate down to every curl and scar. Once Hannibal finished one, he almost immediately started another.

They retired each evening to separate bedrooms only big enough to allow for a single bed and dresser, and they never talked about the future or what they were doing. The whole situation held the flavor of transience, but there was something about it Hannibal clung to hungrily. Now, he stood in the kitchen, alone, anger and confusion thrumming through him, and wondered... *is this desperate feeling... 'home'?*

Any wistfulness for people and safety died with Mischa when he was a child. After that he had little use for soft things, for tenderness, and his experiences were such that he came to value calculation and cool practicality over anything else. He still steeped his soul in the arts, music, and learning, and he let loose his tightly controlled appetites in food and occasional sex. But he found abandon mostly and profoundly in killing. Murder was his supreme joy, his most satisfied delight. *This* was the man he'd crafted for himself, and he was impressed by the results.

But now there was Will with his quiet, sharp thoughts and dangerous unpredictability. The raw emotions of him, like an exposed nerve, and the wall of twitches and unseen psychological rules that he cloaked himself in as surely and effectively as Hannibal's person suit. He lured Hannibal as obviously as the unsuspecting carp he slapped triumphantly down on the kitchen counter to be gutted. Hannibal had become prey, finally, and it made him deeply uncomfortable in a way he'd never experienced. Will saw him as he truly was, and *he stayed*. From that day in the frigid lifeguard station on the Atlantic coast when he'd said he couldn't leave Hannibal, to their escape to Europe and their meager life on the edge of humanity like medieval hermits – Will *stayed* and seemed almost content. And Hannibal hadn't even considered murdering anyone in months.

Is this what peace feels like? For most of his life Hannibal had assumed peace was merely a metaphor.

But now Will was gone, and Hannibal was paralyzed by his sudden revelation: he needed Will, but Will was unencumbered by a similar need. Will's face wasn't on the FBI's website on their 10 Most Wanted page. Will's details weren't posted all over Interpol and Europol. Will wasn't a notorious murderer with a flamboyant nickname and international news media

cachet. Will was barely noticed, marginally famous in the Virginia/Baltimore area thanks to Freddie Lounds, but essentially no one of note and most likely presumed dead. His slate was as clean as it would ever get and, perhaps, he seized on the opportunity. Now safely free of his wife and stepson and the shackles of Jack Crawford, and with access to Hannibal's considerable fortune, and Hannibal constrained from pursuing him... It would be a cunning plan, Hannibal conceded, something worthy of Will's insight and strategy.

A sharp pain drew Hannibal's gaze down and he saw he'd worried the bandage over his knife cut until the wound reopened, spreading crimson blooms across the gauze. He curiously poked at it over and over, until the fresh blood soaked the gauze entirely. He wasn't bothered by it, just mildly unsettled that he'd manifested some unresolved anxiety through an unconscious tick. But he recognized it now and could put an end to the behavior. With purpose temporarily restored, he strode from the kitchen – back straight, shoulders square, feigning a customary security he no longer felt – and set about cleaning and rebandaging the cut in the washroom. When he was done, He looked up and glanced his reflection in the mirror. He seemed harried and worn, still gaunt from the weight he'd lost after the fall as he recovered from his wounds and sepsis. His summer tan was long gone, the highlights in his hair faded revealing some peeking grey, and he was shaggy – both in hair and beard. He smirked a little to think that Will was wrong: no one would look upon this face and see the urbane, natty Dr. Hannibal Lecter. His Shetland sweater even had a substantial hole in it.

He won't come back. There's nothing here to intrigue him anymore. I'd abandon him if our positions were reversed. Remember what he said that first case you worked together? "I don't find you that interesting, Dr. Lecter..."

With effort, Hannibal shook off the pitying self-doubt and left the washroom, disgusted with his weakness.

I don't need Will Graham. I've lived a whole life – richly and entirely – without a meaningful connection to another. I only have to apply these skills as I once did. The first step is to decide where I go when I leave here...

He stopped again in mid-step halfway to his chair next to the fireplace with its dwindling embers.

“What if he didn't leave,” he murmured to himself, his voice raspy from disuse. “What if he was *taken*?”

The world had plenty of its own dangers, independent of Hannibal Lecter, and Will himself admitted that he posed as a fragile character. What if someone took up that invitation? Or worse yet, what if Jack found him? The fact that Hannibal was still a wanted fugitive, when he should've been presumed dead, and Will wasn't mentioned at all just reeked of a Jack Crawford manipulation. Lure Will out into the light and grab him, and assuming he knew anything about Hannibal's whereabouts, Jack would corkscrew it out of him. Hannibal frowned when he considered that if his connection to Will was unhealthy, then Jack's connection certainly matched it in dubiousness.

But what to do with this theory? The only way to gain insight was to expose himself, to go to town and hunt after Will's trail. Since he'd never been seen by the townsfolk before, he was

sure to be noticed when he asked after another foreigner. No, it was not tenable. Will would have to make good on his own. Come daylight, Hannibal would leave and no one who came looking would ever guess he'd lived here in the first place.

His supper curdled in his gut as he made his decision. Something feral thrashed deep within him – something with fangs and antlers and dark claws, pushing him to run to the woods, run to the road, find the town and unleash havoc in bloody gashes and torn limbs until he found what he craved.

Wiiiiiiiii...

He pushed the instincts down and stilled the shaking he noticed in his hands. Instead, he focused on packing the few things he would take with him: clothes, toiletries, phone, charger, fake i.d., his well-thumbed copy of Dante, three superb knives Will had acquired for him from a local metalworker, the roll of cash they kept for emergencies in the icebox, his sketches of Will... That was all he needed – the rest he could burn. He collected anything in the cottage that could be traced back to him and built up the fire until it painted the small living room in orange and gold and deep purple. Will's chair sat bright and empty in the corner of his vision, mocking him, but Hannibal refused to give a bedraggled antique any power over him.

He threw items into the fireplace and allowed the mesmerism of the flames to suck him in for a while. Then the air changed, a cold breeze blowing through the length of the cottage and fluttering the fireplace flames noticeably, rousing him. A door slammed – the one off the back of the kitchen that they never used. Hannibal felt calm settle over him for the first time in three days as he slid his hand into the bag at his side and pulled out a carving knife. He almost shuddered with relief at it.

This is something I know, something I've missed. This is my power...

He rose silently, wary of the squeaking floorboards, and slid to the doorframe separating the living room from the kitchen. In the long shadows by the door someone was huddled, clutching themselves and bent inwards. He didn't hesitate, moving quickly with the ease of practice. *This is my power...* But before he got halfway into the room, the shadow reached out for him.

"H-Hannibal, i-it's me... d-don't kill m-me..."

"Will!"

He kept striding forward and didn't drop the knife. When he reached Will, his fingers curled in Hannibal's sweater as if he needed an anchor. Hannibal pulled him in roughly and wrapped him up, knife and all. Will smelled like dirt and sweat and snow, and he trembled so violently that his teeth clacked loudly against Hannibal's shoulder.

"You're freezing," Hannibal breathed, trying to scent him for something dangerous – blood, injury, trespass...

"Y-yes..."

Hannibal squeezed him so hard Will moaned a little in discomfort. Hannibal didn't care. He was a creature of fangs and antlers and claws now, clutching his prize to himself greedily, aflame with both relief and rage.

"H-Hannibal?" Will squirmed a little but didn't get very far.

"You have leaves in your hair," he murmured, but what his mind said was *you came back*.

"Where have you been?"

"The f-forest. I slept in trees at n-night to avoid the w-wolves. Hence the l-leaves."

Hannibal felt himself smile. "How did you manage that?"

"W-with great d-difficulty." Will coughed from deep within his chest. "Please, c-can we go to t-the fire? I-I think I'm c-close to hypothermia..."

"Yes, of course."

Hannibal shuffled him to the living room, the hand holding the knife curled around Will's shoulders. Neither of them seemed to notice or care. Hannibal installed Will in his chair and relieved him of his coat, boots and hat, and bundled him tightly in every blanket they had. Then he swiftly went to heat some red wine. When he returned, Will was dozing, but his eyes flicked open the moment Hannibal appeared. Hannibal handed him the cup of warmed wine.

"Drink it slowly."

Will held Hannibal's eyes as he blew over it and then sipped it, a shudder running through him as the warmth edged down his throat. Hannibal watched him intently, as if nothing could ever interest him as much as Will's throat working as he drank... Then Will's stare flicked meaningfully to the open bag next to Hannibal's chair.

"Going somewhere?" Will croaked.

"Yes." Hannibal sighed when Will's gaze narrowed with suspicion. "It's been three days. I didn't know what happened to you and had no reasonable way to discover it. Abandoning the cottage seemed the wisest choice."

"And abandoning me in the process, whatever my fate was."

Hannibal's chest constricted sharply, but he took a long breath and then sat in his chair opposite Will, outwardly as calm as he'd ever been.

"What was your fate?" he asked instead.

"I saw Bureau agents in town," Will muttered bluntly, sipping his wine like a good patient.

"Are you sure?"

Will nodded as he moved his eyes to the fire. "Obviously, I didn't know them. They'd be from the Legal Attaché division in whatever embassy we're closest too at the moment. But

it's hard to mistake FBI drones as anything else. Especially when you've been one."

Hannibal sat in silence for a while. "How did they find us? What thread did we leave hanging?"

Will shrugged, still staring at the fire. "Maybe it's not about us. Maybe they are after some other dangerous Americans. There was also an unusual amount of local constabulary about. Maybe the Bureau is assisting them in something unrelated."

"We can't assume it isn't about us, Will. Jack won't give up until he's got us in cuffs or in his morgue. You understand his tenacity better than anyone."

Slowly, Will turned his gaze back to Hannibal, looking exhausted and otherworldly, like a dying sylvan god. "It's been three days. If they knew where you were, Hannibal, you'd be in custody by now."

"Is that why you waited?" Hannibal's stomach clenched but he spoke calmly. Will's eyes got cold as he stared.

"Why do you think I waited?"

"It's a reasonable assumption, Will. Why risk your freedom for mine?"

"It's only a reasonable assumption to you, Hannibal," Will snapped quietly and turned back to the fire. "Don't believe that because we have traits in common that we are the same. That's ego, not insight, Doctor."

Hannibal felt sliced, a quick, sharp statement that brought him low before he realized he was bleeding from it.

"I took three days," Will continued after a pointed silence. "Because the parkplatz was crawling with cops. I couldn't get to the car without dealing with them. And if they were after you, they'd certainly know my face. I had to walk back, Hannibal. And it's winter: the terrain is tough, and the snow is deep."

Hannibal's pulse suddenly pounded in him, surprising and difficult to overcome. He sat forward in his chair, leaning towards Will, but he found that his voice abandoned him. He had to swallow several times before he found it again. Will missed the struggle entirely, mesmerized by his umbrage and the fire in equal measure.

"I'm sorry, Will. I shouldn't have doubted you. You've had many opportunities to free yourself from me, and you always come back."

Hannibal reached for Will's hand holding his mug of wine, causing Will to twitch and his gaze to drift back to Hannibal in shock. His hand came loose from the cup and Hannibal curled Will's fingers, cold and pale, into his, laying them along Will's blanket-covered knee.

You came back to me.

"After everything we've done to one another, that always surprises me," Hannibal murmured.

Will's fingers curled tighter in Hannibal's. "That's not like you. To be surprised by the same outcome more than once."

"You've always been surprising to me, Will." Hannibal felt a smile curl the corners of his mouth, and then saw it mirrored quietly in Will's expression. "You're quite uncommon. For all that I claim to know your mind, you give me the slip disturbingly often. It's invigorating."

Will chuckled. It was weary, like the sort of ironic laughter he did when hunting prey or absorbing something mentally disturbing. It wasn't the bright, open joy of a return from a fishing trip, half soaked, offering Hannibal a muddy prize for dinner.

I'll discover the secret to make you less weary, Will...

"We shall have to leave here," Hannibal murmured, still holding Will's hand. Will's laughter faded.

"Yes."

"It's a shame. I've been happy in this place."

Will's eyes fixed on Hannibal's with a strange intensity. "Have you?"

Hannibal smiled. "Yes, I think I have. That's unusual for me: contentment."

"I thought it would be too... plebian for your tastes." For the first time in this conversation, Will seemed genuinely shocked.

"I find nothing inelegant with an existence that moves in harmony with its surroundings. Like a simple tool that succeeds in its purpose without augmentation or revision, no matter how complex the task. There is beauty in that sort of straightforward understanding." He watched Will carefully. "Like your trips to the forest. When you return, you are the most at peace, the most open I have ever seen."

Will ducked his eyes, a faint blush rising slowly under the blue-white tinge of his chilled skin while Hannibal watched.

"You were content here as well," he said softly.

"Yes," Will sighed. "But there's no point dwelling on it when we have no choice but to move on." Something stopped him, and then he glanced up at Hannibal once more. "What brings you peace, Hannibal?"

"You won't like my answer, Will," he smirked as Will's eyebrows lowered. Provoking his anger had and always would be far too enticing for Hannibal.

"Surely there's something other than *that*, Hannibal."

"And who's making assumptions now?"

Will sighed in a long-suffering way. “If murder was the only thing that brought you peace, you’d have been caught years ago. There’d be so many bodies in your past that you could’ve walked from Europe to America on them.”

“What a whimsically morbid mental picture, William,” Hannibal grinned. “But if we’re being honest, as I assume you wish me to be at all times from now on, I’d say... creation gives me peace. Food, music, art. Whatever I can make from nothing with my hands. I could make an argument that I find murder to be creative as well, but I know you won’t appreciate that.”

“I won’t,” Will said firmly and bluntly, giving Hannibal a baleful stare. Then he softened. “So, you haven’t had much peace here, despite your contentment.”

“I wouldn’t say that at all. I’ve sketched quite a lot during my time here.”

“Have you? What do you sketch?”

“Whatever I see that tempts me with its beauty,” he murmured. “I’ve sketched you often.”

“Me?” Will’s cheeks seemed to darken in the flickering firelight.

“You’re a challenging subject, Will,” Hannibal smiled. “You’re always changing.”

“Huh.” Will flicked his eyes quickly to the fire and went silent for a time. Hannibal still held his hand, and Will seemed content to allow it. “Where shall we go then?” he asked eventually.

“Italy? I love it there.”

“You’re too well known in Italy.” Will seemed upset to be reminding him of it.

“In Florence maybe. But we could go to Venice, or Tuscany...”

“It’s too big a risk, Hannibal,” Will whispered, squeezing his hand.

“I suppose,” Hannibal sighed, surprised by the loss he felt at closing off the option. Then another, terrible idea came to him. He glanced at Will and thought, *it’s perfect*. “We could go home. *My* home. Lithuania. Not to my estate, of course, but it’s in ruins anyway.”

“Hannibal-”

“Vilnius is quite cosmopolitan and there’s a river where you could fish or start a boat repair business if you felt so inclined.”

Will just blinked at him.

“If city life is too risky, there are many beautiful rural regions to get lost in. Or we could go to the Baltic coast, to a port town where strange faces don’t raise any eyebrows.”

“I-it’s your home, Hannibal. The Bureau knows that.”

“It’s a home I haven’t returned to since I was eleven. The connection is tenuous at best. And knowing Jack as I do, he’d think it too obvious an answer and assume I’d make a more circuitous choice. Besides, extradition agreements in Eastern Europe are more like suggestions than rules. We could have a very isolated existence, and isolation confers a certain amount of security. People tend to mind their own business there.”

Will spent some more time blinking. “But... I don’t speak Lithuanian.”

Hannibal smiled, feeling the choice glow inside him, whispering of all those fabled things linked to the concept of ‘home’ that he thought he’d forgotten. “Honestly, you don’t speak German either. You think you do, but, trust me, you don’t.”

Will glared at him, all insulted and pink from under his mess of blankets.

“I’ll teach you,” Hannibal assured him softly, enjoying the idea of more time forced into each other’s company out of remoteness and necessity. “And you could use the challenge.”

“You’re not challenge enough?” Will said it softly, mocking him, but when Hannibal glanced up, Will’s expression suggested it was a genuine question. And that made Hannibal’s guts coil strangely.

He still held Will’s hand in his, and then Will squeezed his fingers back as his expression changed again.

“Will you be happy there, Hannibal?” he asked gently. “You’ve only spoken about how it will be for me. Memories live for you there that you might not want to face.”

Hannibal’s gut coiled tighter, relishing the dark discomfort Will suggested and the possibility that they could experience it together. And if Will used his gift of empathy as well... He’d never known someone he wanted to *share* discomfort with, only those he wished to discomfit for his personal pleasure. He wondered if the pleasure would still exist if they were *both* unsettled at the same time. Would that pleasure be heightened? Emboldened? Would it be like the night they killed the Dragon, when they moved and acted as one? Would it bind him to Will even tighter than he already was? Hannibal suddenly felt a flash of deep hunger, with the coppery taste of blood on his tongue.

“We won’t know unless we attempt it,” he rumbled, trying to keep his antlered, fanged thing from showing its face to Will. *Not yet.* “But I’m willing if you are.”

Will held Hannibal’s stare as his mouth became a tight, straight line. Then he nodded, firelight making odd shadows in his beard as he moved. He continued staring for a long time, and Hannibal withstood it without questions or comments. Finally, Will tore his gaze away to the fire again and released Hannibal’s hand.

“I feel like I’ve somehow offered myself up to be butchered. But I suppose I should be used to that by now, shouldn’t I?” he mumbled with a weird curl to his mouth.

Hannibal smiled, widely and delighted, though Will never turned to see it. *He came back, and he’s chosen to go on with you. And he knows that choice promises danger far greater than*

being caught by the authorities. Oh Will, you are breathtakingly unpredictable...

“Drink your wine,” Hannibal whispered. “Tomorrow will be a long day.”

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!